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EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Buenos Aires

December 28, 1979

[REDACTED]

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Director  
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Washington, D.C. 20520

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/TPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

☒ Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny

Exemption(s):

NR

Declassify: ( ) In Part ☒ In Full

( ) Classify as ( ) Extend as ( ) Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

Dear Claus:

(U) A very happy New Year to you and all your staff. At this end to celebrate the occasion our pouch schedule was changed once again, and the holidays have meant that the pouch must close Friday to make a Tuesday exchange. It disrupts the routine but we will eventually adapt.

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IAHRC Report

[REDACTED] We are still a long way from getting the story on the GOA's reaction to the COHA release on the IAHRC report. I raised it with Cerda and two of his associates in the Casa Rosada and they outright refused to discuss the matter. Cerda's first reaction was to try to change the subject, complaining quite sharply that there was no way a high

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government official could hope to deal with an American Ambassador on a most sensitive topic and not expect to have it leaked to the New York Times by American officials. (He was referring to the Times story on the Shah.) When I pressed him again, he repeated my comments to his associates, and then moved to another topic without comment. When Bill Hallman pressed Gowland, the Foreign Office official who would normally be directly involved in the preparation of the government statement, he said he had known nothing of the matter before the statement, "which was prepared at a very high level". I had originally assumed that the GOA statement was simply a device to discredit the Commission report in advance. Now, because of the unusual sensitivities which are involved, I am sure there's a lot more to it. When Videla was questioned on the report during a recent press conference, he reacted with unusual sharpness to the effect that the report was still confidential, . . . "and we don't leak such information". It may be that the full price of the Commission's visit is just now beginning to dawn on some people in the GOA, and they are looking around for scapegoats. That would explain Cerda's refusal to comment, for he would probably be the first to go.

Given all these indications of emotion running high, we are very curious to know what if any part the Aguilar resignation has in all this. The timing suggests it could be linked to the Argentina report.

#### Human Rights Matters

 We may have reached a point at which we should change some of our assumptions in human rights reporting. In the past we have reported a disappearance based on almost any information, on grounds that our percentage error was going to be small. Now it looks as if political disappearances are virtually halted, and in any event are less numerous than disappearances for criminal or personal reasons. While we have been assured by a number of people in a position to know who were probably sincere that orders have gone out to stop disappearances, we believe that this does not include people known to be engaged in terrorist activities. I cannot imagine a senior officer refusing a subordinate's request to deal summarily with a known terrorist -- the politics are all wrong.

At this end the situation requires that we exercise more care in describing an event as a political disappearance, and the Washington community will have to develop

  
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some practical approach to dealing with the high level of criminal violence - especially kidnapping - which has existed here for many years.

During the Ambassador's consultation you will no doubt be exploring possibilities for new avenues of approach on the major human rights issues, so it occurs to me to pass on the view that it would be unproductive to try to get the GOA to focus on new measures in this field until the flap over the IAHRC report and our own report has died down. There is still the accumulation of indignation that those measures which some in the GOA see as watershed events (IAHRC, Timerman, Campora, etc.) have been met only with an intensified blast of hostile articles on Argentina in the foreign press. There were a lot of people around here who were seriously expecting a pat on the back and were jolted when they got more criticism.

#### The Political Bases

Our political thinkers have not yet come up with their considered opinion, so I will go out on a limb with a personal opinion. So far the importance of the "Bases" is that it became an essential step in the military's dealing with the problem of how do we get back to something like a normal political life. Now the military have taken this step, which may have helped develop some consensus on the topic within the military, the path is presumably cleared for some kind of beginning of political activity. I would be surprised if the "Bases" do strictly define how political activity evolves from now on. The activity could focus on eroding those aspects of the "Bases" which the politicians can't stomach.

One of the most depressing aspects of the current situation is that there is no emerging basis for healthy political activity. A group of old political hacks retain their spokesmen's role for various parties which are moribund. Political comment is restricted almost exclusively to criticism of the economic policy, and politicians don't seem to feel that they are required to do anything more than criticize. I cannot recall seeing anybody proposing alternatives, or even seriously defining problems. This is very unhealthy, and it is only partly related to real or imagined repression. It goes to lack of consensus, which is a problem of 50 years standing in this country. Tony Freeman

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has a long report in the works which should deal with all this in greater detail, and he may feel the "Bases" have greater significance, but I'll let him speak for himself.

Sincerely,



Maxwell Chaplin

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